

Standards Committee report



14 October 2021

STANDARDS ASSESSMENT / HEARING SUB-COMMITTEES MEMBERSHIP

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| Exempt / confidential / not for publication | No |
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1. Purpose

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 21 July 2021, the Committee requested that officers review whether there would be any advantage in increasing the number of members who sit on Standards Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committees.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the report be noted.
- 2.2 That the number of members required for an Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committees not be increased.

3. Background

- 3.1 Last year, multiple high-profile complaints were received which were delegated, by the Monitoring Officer, to an Assessment Sub-Committee for consideration.
- 3.2 On occasion, there were issues with members' availability and Councillors who were not members of the Committee were substituted onto the Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committees. Whilst these substitutes had been correctly appointed, this required additional training for members who were not existing member of the Standards Committee.
- 3.3 At present, Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committees do not have to be politically balanced, but the Council's arrangements for dealing with standards complaints indicates that they will be, wherever possible. A co-opted (non-voting) Parish Councillor is required when the complaint relates to a Parish / Town Councillor.

- 3.4 The current political balance for a Sub-Committee of three is as follows; 1 Conservative, 1 Labour and 1 Liberal Democrat. If the number of Sub-Committee members were increased, the balance would also potentially change as a larger number of Sub-Committee members would more accurately reflect the overall composition of the Council.
- 3.5 Notwithstanding the point about political balance, there are advantages and disadvantages of an enlarged Sub-Committee. For example, additional members would allow for a more varied debate, but conversely increase meeting length to allow all members the opportunity to provide their views.
- 3.6 Most persuasively though, increasing the number of members who sit on an Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committees would not solve the issue of member availability. In fact, it would be more difficult as the number of members required to be available would be increased, but the pool of members would remain the same.
- 3.7 The Committee could consider recommending an increase to the overall number of members who sit on the Standards Committee. However, it is important to remember that:
- (a) there were an unusually high number of complaints requiring Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committees during 2020/21 compared to previous years; and
 - (b) because of the postponement of by-elections caused by the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Council had a number of Casual Vacancies during 2020/21 which could not be filled, and for reasons of political proportionality the Standards Committee carried a vacancy, meaning the pool of available Councillors was 8 as opposed to the usual 9.
- 3.8 Any recommendations made by the Committee in relation to either the number of seats on Standards Committee, or the number of seats on an Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committee, would be an amendment to the Council's constitution and would therefore need to be agreed by Full Council.
4. Alternatives
- 4.1 The Committee could increase the number of members who sit on Assessment / Hearing Sub-Committees.
- 4.2 The Committee could request officers to review the number of members who sit on the Standards Committee. This would ensure a larger number of members whose availability could be ascertained.